

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE DISTRICT OF SOUTH CAROLINA

John Bernard Robinson, #280311,)	C/A No.: 1:09-1977-RBH-SVH
)	
Petitioner,)	
)	
vs.)	REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION
)	
Anthony Padula, Warden Lee)	
Correctional,)	
)	
Respondent.)	

Petitioner John Bernard Robinson is an inmate at the Lee Correctional Institution serving a sentence for the murder of his girlfriend Kristen Lee Smith. He filed this pro se petition for a writ of habeas corpus pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 2254. This matter is before the court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 636(b) and Local Civil Rule 73.02(B)(2) DSC for a Report and Recommendation on Respondent's motion for summary judgment and return. [Entry ## 21, 22]. Pursuant to *Roseboro v. Garrison*, 528 F.2d 309 (4th Cir. 1975), the court advised Petitioner of the summary judgment and dismissal procedures and the possible consequences if he failed to respond adequately to the respondent's motion. [Entry #23]. Petitioner filed a response in opposition to Respondent's motion. [Entry #28]. Having carefully considered the parties' submissions and the record in this case, the court finds that Respondent's motion for summary judgment should be granted.

I. Procedural Background

In March 2001, Petitioner was indicted by the Dorchester County grand jury for the November 3, 2000 homicide of Smith (2001-GS-18-325). Petitioner was represented

by Gene W. Dukes, Esq. at a jury trial. On December 5, 2001, the jury found Petitioner guilty as indicted for murder, and the Honorable Luke N. Brown sentenced him to confinement for forty years. A timely Notice of Appeal was filed on Petitioner's behalf and an *Anders*¹ brief was submitted by Joseph L. Savitz, III, Esq. on October 30, 2002 and petition to be relieved as counsel raised as the sole arguable ground: The judge erred by refusing to direct a verdict acquitting appellant of murdering his girlfriend. Petitioner filed a pro se brief on December 3, 2002, asserting the following:

1. The judge erred by finding no violation of Miranda rights; and
2. The judge erred in allowing the "hearsay" testimony of witness Lavonne Kennerly.

The South Carolina Court of Appeals dismissed the appeal pursuant to *Anders v. California*, 386 U.S. 738 (1967) and *State v. Williams*, 406 S.E.2d 357 (S.C. 1991) in *State v. Robinson*, Op. No. 2003-UP-371 (S.C. Ct. App. filed May 22, 2003). The remittitur was issued on June 25, 2003.

Petitioner filed a pro se application for post-conviction relief (PCR) in Dorchester County on May 21, 2004 (*Robinson v. State*, 2004-CP-18-861), in which he alleged ten

¹*Anders v. California*, 386 U.S. 738 (1967). *Anders* requires that counsel who seeks to withdraw after finding the "case to be wholly frivolous" following a "conscientious examination" must submit a brief referencing anything in the record that arguably could support an appeal; furnish a copy of that brief to the defendant; and after providing the defendant with an opportunity to respond, the reviewing court must conduct a full examination of the proceedings to determine if further review is merited. *Anders*, 386 U.S. at 744.

grounds of ineffective assistance of counsel, defects in the court's subject matter jurisdiction, prosecutorial misconduct, and several grounds of plain error.

A PCR evidentiary hearing was held on January 9, 2007, at which Petitioner testified and was represented by Charles T. Brooks, III, Esq. On March 16, 2007, the Honorable James C. Williams, Jr. entered his written order of dismissal. Petitioner appealed the denial of state PCR. On appeal, he was represented by Katherine H. Hudgins, Appellate Defender from the South Carolina Commission on Indigent Defense. In the Petition for Writ of Certiorari, dated October 13, 2007, he asserted as the issue presented:

Did the PCR judge err in refusing to grant a continuance in order for PCR counsel to secure funding for and hire an investigator to explore issues of third party guilt when the trial attorney admitted that he did not independently investigate the purported alibi of a third party?

On July 23, 2008, the Supreme Court of South Carolina entered its letter order that the petition for writ of certiorari was denied. The remittitur was issued on August 11, 2009.

II. Discussion

A. Federal Habeas Issues

Petitioner raises the following issues in his federal petition for a writ of habeas corpus:

Ground One: Ineffective Assistance of Counsel

Supporting Facts: Petitioner alleges he asked but his counsel failed to file for preliminary hearing, evidentiary hearing and motion for speedy trial; that counsel was not prepared for trial, especially jury selection; that counsel failed to object to in-court identification of Petitioner by two witnesses; that counsel failed to obtain

expert witnesses especially for DNA purpose; that counsel failed to object to prosecutor's "store-bought" tire iron remarks and demonstration; that counsel's summation was unfocused and prejudicial; that counsel failed to utilize an investigator; that counsel smelled of alcohol and appeared inebriated.

Ground Two: Prosecutorial Misconduct

Supporting Facts: Petitioner alleges prosecutorial misconduct in misleading and prejudicial summation, in appealing to jury's sympathy unfairly and in violation of due process, prejudicially affecting Petitioner's substantial rights; misconduct by prosecutor regarding "store-bought" tire iron remarks and demonstration.

Ground Three: Plain Error

Supporting Facts: Petitioner alleges plain error by trial judge in admitting evidence by prosecutor regarding "store-bought" tire iron remarks and demonstration; by trial judge failing to give curative instruction regarding tire iron demonstration; in jury instructions regarding alibi; in admitting Petitioner's pre-Mirandized statement/recording; in allowing in-court identification of Petitioner by two witnesses without prior in-camera hearing;

B. Standard for Summary Judgment

Summary judgment is appropriate only "if the pleadings, depositions, answers to interrogatories, and admissions on file, together with the affidavits, if any, show that there is no genuine issue as to any material fact and that the moving party is entitled to a judgment as a matter of law." Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(c). Rule 56(c) mandates entry of summary judgment "against a party who fails to make a showing sufficient to establish the existence of an element essential to that party's case." *Celotex Corp. v. Catrett*, 477 U.S. 317, 322 (1986).

In deciding whether there is a genuine issue of material fact, the evidence of the non-moving party is to be believed and all justifiable inferences must be drawn in favor

of the non-moving party. *See Anderson v. Liberty Lobby, Inc.*, 477 U.S. 242, 255 (1986). However, “[o]nly disputes over facts that might affect the outcome of the suit under the governing law will properly preclude the entry of summary judgment. Factual disputes that are irrelevant or unnecessary will not be counted.” *Id.* at 248.

The moving party has the burden of proving that summary judgment is appropriate. Once the moving party makes this showing, however, the opposing party may not rest upon mere allegations or denials, but rather must, by affidavits or other means permitted by the Rule, set forth specific facts showing that there is a genuine issue for trial. *See Fed. R. Civ. P. 56(e)*. Further, while the federal court is charged with liberally construing a complaint filed by a pro se litigant to allow the development of a potentially meritorious case, *see, e.g., Cruz v. Beto*, 405 U.S. 319 (1972), the requirement of liberal construction does not mean that the court can ignore a clear failure in the pleadings to allege facts which set forth a federal claim, nor can the court assume the existence of a genuine issue of material fact where none exists. *Weller v. Dep’t of Soc. Servs.*, 901 F.2d 387 (4th Cir. 1990).

C. Habeas Corpus Standard of Review

1. Generally

Because Petitioner filed his petition after the effective date of the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 (“AEDPA”), review of his claims is governed by 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d), as amended. *Lindh v. Murphy*, 521 U.S. 320 (1997); *Breard v. Pruett*, 134 F.3d 615 (4th Cir. 1998). Under the AEDPA, federal courts may not grant

habeas corpus relief unless the underlying state adjudication: (1) resulted in a decision that was contrary to, or involved an unreasonable application of clearly established federal law, as determined by the Supreme Court of the United States; or (2) resulted in a decision that was based on an unreasonable application of the facts in light of the evidence presented at the state court proceeding. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(d)(1)(2); *see Williams v. Taylor*, 529 U.S. 362, 398 (2000). “[A] federal habeas court may not issue the writ simply because that court concludes in its independent judgment that the relevant state-court decision applied clearly established federal law erroneously or incorrectly. Rather, that application must also be unreasonable.” *Id.* at 410. Moreover, state court factual determinations are presumed to be correct and the petitioner has the burden of rebutting this presumption by clear and convincing evidence. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(e)(1).

2. Procedural Bar

Federal law establishes this court’s jurisdiction over habeas corpus petitions. 28 U.S.C. § 2254 (“Section 2254”). This statute permits relief when a person “is in custody in violation of the Constitution or laws or treaties of the United States[,]” and requires that a petitioner present his claim to the state’s highest court with authority to decide the issue before the federal court will consider the claim. *Id.* The separate but related theories of exhaustion and procedural bypass operate in a similar manner to require a habeas petitioner to first submit his claims for relief to the state courts. A habeas corpus petition filed in this court before the petitioner has appropriately exhausted available

state-court remedies or has otherwise bypassed seeking relief in the state courts will be dismissed absent unusual circumstances detailed below.

a. Exhaustion

Section 2254 contains the requirement of exhausting state-court remedies and provides as follows:

- (b) (1) An application for a writ of habeas corpus on behalf of a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court, shall not be granted unless it appears that—
 - (A) the applicant has exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State; or
 - (B) (i) there is an absence of available State corrective process; or
 - (ii) circumstances exist that render such process ineffective to protect the rights of the applicant.
- (2) An application for a writ of habeas corpus may be denied on the merits, notwithstanding the failure of the applicant to exhaust the remedies available in the courts of the State.
- (3) A State shall not be deemed to have waived the exhaustion requirement or be estopped from reliance upon the requirement unless the State, through counsel, expressly waives the requirement.
- (c) An applicant shall not be deemed to have exhausted the remedies available in the courts of the State, within the meaning of this section, if he has the right under the law of the State to raise, by any available procedure, the question presented.

28 U.S.C. § 2254.

The statute requires that, before seeking habeas corpus relief, the petitioner first must exhaust his state court remedies. 28 U.S.C. § 2254(b)(1)(A). “To satisfy the

exhaustion requirement, a habeas petitioner must present his claims to the state's highest court." *Matthews v. Evatt*, 105 F.3d 907, 911 (4th Cir. 1997). Thus, a federal court may consider only those issues that have been properly presented to the highest state courts with jurisdiction to decide them.

In South Carolina, a person in custody has two primary means of attacking the validity of his conviction: (1) through a direct appeal, or (2) by filing an application for PCR. State law requires that all grounds be stated in the direct appeal or PCR application. Rule 203 SCACR; S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-10, *et seq.*; S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-90; *Blakeley v. Rabon*, 221 S.E.2d 767 (S.C. 1976). If the PCR court fails to address a claim as is required by S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-80, counsel for the applicant must make a motion to alter or amend the judgment pursuant to Rule 59(e), SCRCPP. Failure to do so will result in the application of a procedural bar by the South Carolina Supreme Court. *Marlar v. State*, 653 S.E.2d 266 (S.C. 2007).² Furthermore, strict time deadlines govern direct appeal and the filing of a PCR in the South Carolina courts. A PCR must be filed within one year of judgment, or if there is an appeal, within one year of the appellate court decision. S.C. Code Ann. § 17-27-45.

²In *Bostick v. Stevenson*, 589 F.3d 160, 162–65 (4th Cir. 2009), the Fourth Circuit found that, prior to the Supreme Court of South Carolina's November 5, 2007 decision in *Marlar*, South Carolina courts had not uniformly and strictly enforcing the failure to file a motion pursuant to Rule 59(e), SCRCPP, as a procedural bar. Accordingly, for matters in which there was a PCR ruling prior to November 5, 2007, the court will not consider any failure to raise issues pursuant to Rule 59(e) to effect a procedural bar.

Furthermore, in filing a petition for habeas relief in the federal court, a petitioner may present only those issues that were presented to the South Carolina Supreme Court through direct appeal or through an appeal from the denial of the PCR application, regardless of whether the Supreme Court actually reached the merits of the claim. If any avenue of state relief is still available, the petitioner must proceed through the state courts before requesting a writ of habeas corpus in the federal courts. *Richardson v. Turner*, 716 F.2d 1059 (4th Cir. 1983); *Patterson v. Leake*, 556 F.2d 1168 (4th Cir. 1977).

b. Procedural Bypass

Procedural bypass, sometimes referred to as procedural bar or procedural default,³ is the doctrine applied when a petitioner who seeks habeas corpus relief as to an issue failed to raise that issue at the appropriate time in state court and has no further means of bringing that issue before the state courts. In such a situation, the person has bypassed his state remedies and, as such, is procedurally barred from raising the issue in his federal habeas petition. The United States Supreme Court has stated that the procedural bypass of a constitutional claim in earlier state proceedings forecloses consideration by the federal courts. *See Smith v. Murray*, 477 U.S. 527, 533 (1986). Bypass can occur at any level of the state proceedings if a state has procedural rules that bar its courts from considering claims not raised in a timely fashion.

³If a petitioner procedurally bypasses his state-court remedies, he is procedurally barred from raising them in federal court.

The South Carolina Supreme Court will refuse to consider claims raised in a second appeal that could have been raised at an earlier time. Further, if a prisoner has failed to file a direct appeal or a PCR and the deadlines for filing have passed, he is barred from proceeding in state court. If the state courts have applied a procedural bar to a claim because of an earlier default in the state courts, the federal court honors that bar.

As the Supreme Court explains:

. . . [state procedural rules promote] not only the accuracy and efficiency of judicial decisions, but also the finality of those decisions, by forcing the defendant to litigate all of his claims together, as quickly after trial as the docket will allow, and while the attention of the appellate court is focused on his case.

Reed v. Ross, 468 U.S. 1, 10–11 (1984).

However, if a federal habeas petitioner can show both (1) “‘cause’ for noncompliance with the state rule[,]” and (2) “‘actual prejudice resulting from the alleged constitutional violation[,]’” the federal court may consider the claim. *Smith v. Murray*, 477 U.S. at 533 (quoting *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 23, 84 (1977)). When a petitioner has failed to comply with state procedural requirements and cannot make the required showing of cause and prejudice, the federal courts generally decline to hear the claim. *Murray v. Carrier*, 477 U.S. 478, 496 (1986).

If a federal habeas petitioner has failed to raise a claim in state court and is precluded by state rules from returning to state court to raise the issue, he has procedurally bypassed his opportunity for relief in the state courts and in federal court. A federal court is barred from considering the filed claim (absent a showing of cause and

actual prejudice). In such an instance, the exhaustion requirement is technically met and the rules of procedural bar apply. See *Matthews v. Evatt*, 105 F.3d at 915 (citing *Coleman v. Thompson*, 501 U.S. 722, 735 n.1 (1991); *Teague v. Lane*, 489 U.S. 288, 297–98 (1989); *George v. Angelone*, 100 F.3d 353, 363 (4th Cir. 1996); *Bassette v. Thompson*, 915 F.2d 932, 937 (4th Cir. 1990)).

3. Cause and Actual Prejudice

Because the requirement of exhaustion is not jurisdictional, this court may consider claims that have not been presented to the South Carolina Supreme Court in limited circumstances in which a petitioner shows sufficient cause for failure to raise the claim and actual prejudice resulting from the failure, *Coleman*, 501 U.S. at 750, or that a “fundamental miscarriage of justice” has occurred. *Murray*, 477 U.S. at 495–96. A petitioner may prove cause if he can demonstrate ineffective assistance of counsel relating to the default, show an external factor which hindered compliance with the state procedural rule, or demonstrate the novelty of a particular claim. *Id.* Absent a showing of “cause,” the court is not required to consider “actual prejudice.” *Turner v. Jabe*, 58 F.3d 924 (4th Cir. 1995). However, if a petitioner demonstrates sufficient cause, he must also show actual prejudice in order to excuse a default. *Murray*, 477 U.S. at 492. To show actual prejudice, the petitioner must demonstrate more than plain error.

D. Analysis

Petitioner's Action Is Untimely.

Respondent's first ground for dismissal of this Petition is that it was not timely filed under the one-year statute of limitations created by the AEDPA. As discussed briefly above, the AEDPA became effective on April 24, 1996 and substantially modified procedures for consideration of habeas corpus petitions of state inmates in the federal courts. One of those changes was the amendment of 28 U.S.C. § 2244 to establish a one-year statute of limitations for filing habeas petitions. Subsection (d) of the statute provides:

(d) (1) A 1-year period of limitation shall apply to an application for a writ of habeas corpus by a person in custody pursuant to the judgment of a State court. The limitation period shall run from the latest of—

- (A) **the date on which the judgment became final by the conclusion of direct review or the expiration of the time for seeking such review;**
- (B) the date on which the impediment to filing an application created by State action in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States is removed, if the applicant was prevented from filing by such State action;
- (C) the date on which the constitutional right asserted was initially recognized by the Supreme Court, if the right has been newly recognized by the Supreme Court and made retroactively applicable to cases on collateral review; or
- (D) the date on which the factual predicate of the claim or claims presented could have been discovered through the exercise of due diligence.

(2) **The time during which a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending shall not be counted toward**

any period of limitation under this subsection.

28 U.S.C. § 2254(d) (emphasis added). Subsection (d)(1)(A) provides that the one-year statute of limitations begins to run on the date the Petitioner's conviction becomes final. The statute does not begin after collateral review is completed. *Harris v. Hutchinson*, 209 F.3d 325, 327 (4th Cir. 2000). In South Carolina, a defendant must file a notice of appeal within ten days of his conviction. Rule 203(b)(2), SCACR. Thus if a defendant does not file a direct appeal, his conviction becomes final ten days after the adjudication of guilt. *Crawley v. Catoe*, 257 F.3d 395 (4th Cir. 2001). If a defendant files a direct appeal and his conviction is affirmed, the conviction becomes final ninety days after the final ruling of the South Carolina Supreme Court. *Harris*, 209 F.3d at 328, n.1 (conviction become final on the expiration of the 90-day period to seek review by the United States Supreme Court).

The statute of limitations is tolled during the period that “a properly filed application for State post-conviction or other collateral review with respect to the pertinent judgment or claim is pending.” 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2). The statute of limitations is tolled for the entire period of the state post-conviction process, “from initial filing to final disposition by the highest state court (whether decision on the merits, denial of certiorari, or expiration of the period of time to seek further appellate review).” *Taylor v. Lee*, 196 F.3d 557, 561 (4th Cir. 1999). Following the denial of relief in the state courts in state habeas proceedings, neither the time for filing a petition for certiorari in the

United States Supreme Court, nor the time a petition for certiorari is considered by the United States Supreme Court, is tolled.” *Crawley v. Catoe*, 258 F.3d at 399.

A state collateral proceeding must be “properly filed” for the statutory tolling provisions of 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d)(2) to apply. “(A)n application is ‘properly filed’ when its delivery and acceptance are in compliance with the applicable laws and rules governing filings. These usually prescribe, for example, the form of the document, the time limits upon its delivery, the court and office in which it must be lodged, and the requisite filing fee.” *Artuz v. Bennett*, 531 U.S. 4, 8 (2000) (footnote omitted). “When a post-conviction petition is untimely under state law, ‘that [is] the end of the matter’ for purposes of § 2244(d)(2).” *Pace v. DiGulielmo*, 544 U.S. 408, 414 (2005) (*quoting Carey v. Saffold*, 536 U.S. 214, 236 (2002)). Generally, the computation of periods of time under 28 U.S.C. § 2244(d) (2) is pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 6(a). *Hernandez v. Caldwell*, 225 F.3d 435, 439 (4th Cir. 2000).

The Fourth Circuit has held that the statute of limitations in § 2254 is not jurisdictional, but subject to the doctrine of equitable tolling. Equitable tolling applies only in “those rare instances where—due to circumstances external to the [Petitioner’s] own conduct—it would be unconscionable to enforce the limitation against the [Petitioner].” *Harris*, 209 F.3d at 330. Under § 2244(d), the State bears the burden of asserting the statute of limitations. Petitioner then bears the burden of establishing that his petition is timely or that he is entitled to the benefit of the doctrine of equitable tolling. *Hill v. Braxton*, 277 F.3d 701 (4th Cir. 2002).

The present petition is clearly untimely. The Court of Appeals issued the Remittitur on June 25, 2003. Because Petitioner did not seek further review by the South Carolina Supreme Court, his conviction became final on that date because he was not entitled to the ninety-day period to seek review by the United States Supreme Court. *Riddle v. Kemma*, 523 F.3d 850 (8th Cir. 2008); *Hammond v. Hagan*, C/A NO.: 4:07-1081-JFA, 2008 WL 2922860, *3 (D.S.C. July 24, 2008). Therefore, Petitioner had one year from June 25, 2003 to file his habeas corpus petition. On May 21, 2004, with thirty-four days remaining in which to file his habeas corpus petition, Petitioner chose to file his PCR application, thereby tolling the one-year clock. The petition for writ of certiorari was denied on July 23, 2008 and the remittitur issued on August 11, 2008. The clock resumed upon the issuance of the remittitur, but Petitioner waited until July 21, 2009 to file his habeas corpus petition, some 310 days too late.

Petitioner has not shown that he is entitled to equitable tolling. To benefit from the doctrine of equitable tolling, Petitioner must show that there was 1) an “‘extraordinary circumstance,’ 2) beyond his control or external to his own conduct, 3) that prevented him from filing on time.” *Rouse v. Lee*, 339 F.3d 238, 246 (4th Cir. 2003). Petitioner has not attempted to put forth any arguments, facts, or evidence in support of an argument for equitable tolling.

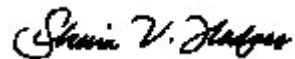
The court agrees that the Petition should be dismissed on statute-of-limitations grounds. The filing was plainly untimely and no equitable-tolling argument has been

raised. The undersigned recommends that Respondent's motion for summary judgment be granted.

III. Conclusion

For the foregoing reasons, the undersigned recommends that Respondent's motion for summary judgment be granted and the Petition be dismissed with prejudice.

IT IS SO RECOMMENDED.



August 3, 2010
Florence, South Carolina

Shiva V. Hodges
United States Magistrate Judge

**The parties are directed to note the important information in the attached
“Notice of Right to File Objections to Report and Recommendation.”**